



# SpN!

Documenting Underground Culture...

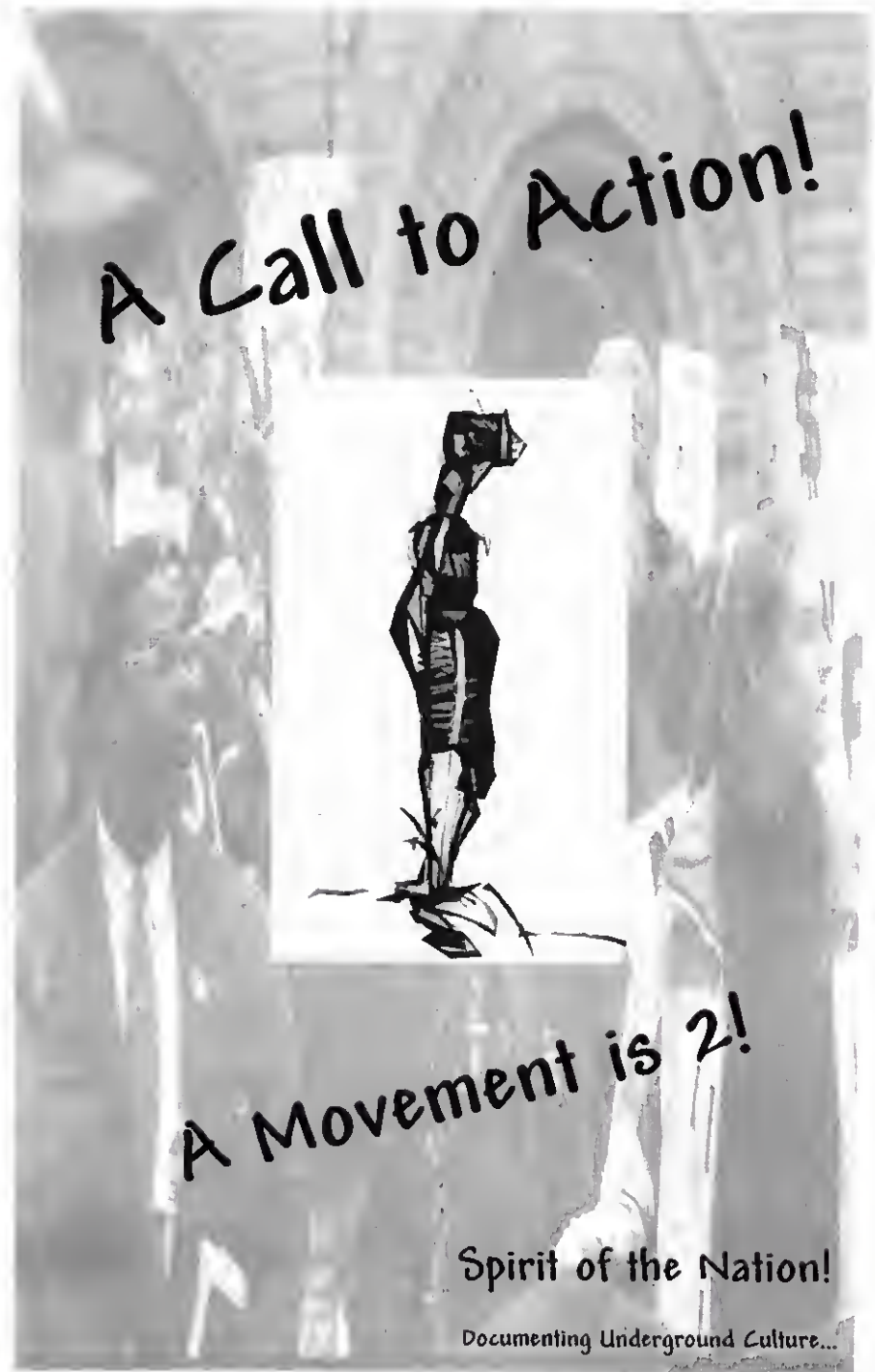
Next Issue Coming October 2006!

# 2

Don't Believe the Hype!

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# THE CONGRESS OF THE FUTURE The Declaration of Awareness! A DECLARATION

When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for people to dissolve the political controls created by a system which gives corporations the same rights as individuals, when these corporations use their abundant resources to promote their individual voice over the collective cries of the majority—then it is imperative to sever the ties which bind our current government to corporate influence.

This modern "Callded Age," which permits professional politicians to allow mass deregulation, and perpetuate an economic shift, where entire factorie are exported and simultaneously allowing the gap between the rich and the poor to increase ever more. This long standing political climate leaves 30 million Americans living in poverty and 3 million a year homeless in our great land of opportunity. And all the while, middle America continues to slumber, being lulled to sleep by the "Reality" they see on their televisions, and distracted with the pursuit of upper-class symbols.

In the midst of all this—we hold these truths to be self-evident, that every human should have equal value, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights which include food, clothes, and shelter, equal access to education, employment, and health care, and among those the right to liberty, a healthy life, and the pursuit of something more meaningful than the suburban, middle-class, lifestyle.

While striving for a real democracy, all people should have a voice that is heard by the politicians who supposedly represent them. This voice should be anchored in the pursuit of the common good, rather than the corporate dollar. Professional politicians must be done away with, and we must strive for a new political era when civil service will be the goal of the politician rather than campaign financing.

Indeed, the corporate influence which binds hands of true democracy will not easily be broken. However, it is the sharp cut of awareness which will help the people to regain control of this country once again. We must begin to shake ourselves free from the apathy and ignorance that blurs democracy, which was once clear. We must realize that we are not alone; there are many who are willing and able to fight for democracy, and there are many who simply need to be awakened. This is The Declaration of Awareness!

## SPN! A Call To Action!

The word "optimism," used here, makes me a little uneasy, because it suggests a blithe, slightly sappy, whistler in the dark of our time. But I use it anyway, not because I am totally confident that the world will get better, but because I am certain that ONLY such confidence can prevent people from giving up the game before all the cards have been played. The metaphor is deliberate; it is a gamble. Not to play is to foreclose any chance of winning. To play, to act, is to create at least a possibility of changing the world.

—Howard Zinn, *Failure to Quit*

During times of pessimism and uncertainty activists and organizations should not fret. Convergence still allows for the meaningful existence of all of the movement organizations. However, instead of just working for a specific objective, groups should be encouraged to think and work in ways that allow them to collaborate and network with others who are working towards 'different' aims. Democracy should exist in both the individual and organizational sense. If there is a sense of privilege, then it should shift from person to person and group to group depending upon the issue and expertise at hand, but never enough where one certain person or entity can begin to determine the course of the culture. Because, essentially, all social activists and organizations are participating in a culture that functions relatively aside the meaning and myth making machines that tend to exercise hegemony in the world. Therefore, all activists and organizations are working toward one common goal—change—which will hopefully include speaking a unified language of movement.

The problem of those who wait—it requires luck and much that is incalculable if a higher human being in whom there slumbers the solution is to act—break out! one might say—at the right time. Usually it does not happen, and in every corner of the earth there are people waiting who hardly know to what extent they are waiting but even less that they are waiting in vain. Sometimes the awakening call, that chance event which gives 'permission' to act, comes but too late—when the best part of youth and the strength to act has already been used up in standing still, and how many a [person] has discovered to [his/hers] horror when [s/he] 'rose up' that [his/hers] limbs had gone to sleep and [his/her] spirit was already too heavy! 'It is too late'—[s/he] has said to [him/herself], having lost faith in [him/herself] and henceforth for ever useless. Could it be that in the realm of genius, 'Kaphael without hands' is, taking the phrase in its widest sense, not the exception but the rule?—Perhaps genius is not so very rare; perhaps what is rare is the five hundred hands needed to tyrannize over the *Kairos*, the right time—to take chance by the forelock!

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*.



class, and gender. Additionally, eradication and elimination often creates vacuums and vacuums tend to breed extremism.

Extremism only discourages the interdependence of ideas, the intersectionality of reality, and reinforces more extremism. Why? One could look to Newton's third law of motion for insight—*"For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction."* With every revolution comes counterrevolution; and if a regime, dominant culture, or idea, has not experienced its' counterrevolution then the dominant party (whomever they fit may be) is usually devoting energy toward trying to suppress any possibilities of counterrevolution (i.e. the United States).

Subsequently, this insecure state of being often facilitates a structure that is often autocratic rather than democratic, hierarchical rather than egalitarian. Instead of loosely linking with other organizations, structures often seek to conserve power—which usually produces conflict (See the NAACP, SNCC, and CORE during the 1960s as an illustration). Therefore the overarching goal becomes harmony and balance—within the movement and also within oneself. Because there will always be tension between certain ideas, groups, people, and self. Therefore instead of being obsessive about ignoring certain tendencies that we may abhor (power broking, materialism, violence, etc.); we should seek to live in a state that acknowledges those conflicts while seeking a positive peace.

This tension makes the ability to provide a formidable counterbalance that emphasizes possibility and accounts for a shifting reality rather than the absolute righteousness of any idea imperative. We should hope to get away from this seemingly human tendency of destruction—whether it is another person, habitat and nation, ones self, and importantly, ideas. Movement is about change and change is about sustaining life—not facilitating death. We need to allow certain ideas to have breathing room to evolve; we need to allow ourselves the freedom to dissect "opposing" ideas (i.e. capitalism, Marxism, communism, socialism) in the efforts of forming a more adequate means of living.

## A Movement is 2!

*How possibilities become endless, thoughts become infectious, and action becomes inescapable.*

Marginalization is all around us. People are always trying to find ways to over-analyze, or preach on how something could or should be done more appropriately, and essentially keep all of us from one thing -- action. These type of people are everywhere, they are our parents, our friends, our professors, and even those who claim to want change. Moreover, since the academy has subsumed liberal movement unto itself, people everywhere are implicitly taught that they must be highly specialized and perfectly thought-out before attempting change. The talking heads on our televisions (boxes for mind control) reinforce this conception, and remind us that there are only "experts" rather than reasonable citizens who are able to think for themselves. However, this line of thought need not continue, and we need not be marginalized by those who fear to act on what they think is right.

But how? How do we change and shake up a society that is obsessed with normalization and marginalization? It's very simple. A movement is 2. Forget all that you think you know about change, or whatever sexy version of social movements you've pictured in your brain, because a movement is simple -- a movement is 2.

First and foremost, 2 people. Each person encouraging and pushing the other. Each person adding to the mix -- adding to the synthesis. There's nothing wrong with acting out on your own, except for the fact that you're on your own. There's an energy between 2 minds that are trying to progress and trying to think of new "ways" and "hows" for our society. There's a positive tension between 2 minds that are pushing one another to actually do something rather than be someone who is simply right and all on their own. There's no difference between being right and being wrong when you're on your own and doing nothing. However, when you find another person who is like-minded then something happens -- a community is born. But, the community only stays alive when the 2 begin acting on the 2 basic actions of a community for change -- (1) moving and (2) reproducing. If the community works towards these basic principals then other people will begin to be drawn to the life of the community.

Movement is essential. It need not be any lofty task, although, there's nothing wrong with lofty goals, but movement is action, it is the essential reason that the 2 people are more than just a couple of guys or gals talking politics in a coffee shop. It is the spark of life that will essentially draw others to join this community. A reason. A motive. An idea. An action. It could be as simple as developing a pamphlet to counter a dangerous yet popular belief, or it could be a think tank working towards reinventing the structure of our government, and then writing about the new ideas. But thinking and awareness and writing is only the first step -- you must find a way to enact your thoughts and visions, a way to put your theory to practice -- otherwise you might as

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well become a talking head (an "expert").

Reproducing is also essential. However, reproduction is not only the addition of another member to the community, but also the reproduction of a new idea, or the reproduction of the idea that new ideas are possible, and that these new ideas need and must be followed with action. The 2 is recursive and reciprocal, it is a cycle and a synthesis, an oscillation. Moving and reproducing add and take from one another. When we move there will be those who are attracted to the moving and thus reproduction occurs. And when we reproduce, new ideas will be added to the mix and thus new action -- movement. The 2 actions work with and upon one another, just like the 2 people.

If you notice, a movement of 2 does not require an assimilation to a certain ideology, but simply the ability to change yourself in relation to someone else, and the will to allow that relationship to become an action. Some might argue that this is in fact the "liberal" mindset, but I would argue that the word "liberal" no longer holds any real meaning. We need to free ourselves of the binding nature of the current leftist terminology, and simply work together to create something new, something that accounts for more than the current left/right binary allows. We need a synthesis. We need change. However, this will not be possible until we begin to realize the basic nature of change, and we must move if we are going to change. Someone once said that insanity is simply the notion that the repetition of the same action will bring about a different result. If this is at all true then it is time to try something new -- it's time to move. The possibilities are endless, but movement is simple, it is 2.

**Claudia Tate: What determines your responsibility to yourself and to your audience?**

Bambara: I start with the recognition that we are at war, and that war is not simply a hot debate between the capitalist camp and the socialist camp over which economic/political/social arrangement will have hegemony in the world. It's not just the battle over turf and who has the right to utilize resources for whomsoever's benefit. The war is also being fought over the truth: what is the truth about human nature, about the human potential? My responsibility to myself, my neighbors, my family, and my human family is to try to tell the truth. That ain't easy. There are so few truth-speaking traditions in this society in which the myth of "Western civilization" has claimed allegiance of so many.

- Toni Cade Bambara, Author

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*language quite yet. Is this is this an anti-corporate globalization movement? Is this a global justice movement? Is it a peace and justice movement? Is this a popular movement? Is it one movement or many?\**

To answer Fithian, we may not know if the movement can even be *one* yet, but we know that the problems and issues that are afoot are plenty. And it may seem as if it were next to impossible to attack every single issue through a single broad-based movement formation since social problems seem to all be cumulative, fragmented, concentrated, and globalized. Consequently we have been witnessed to a variety of social movement organizations specializing on addressing a particular problem--whether it is poverty, police brutality, war and violence, hyperconsumerism--all speaking in their own languages through a variety of means.

*Convergence says it best. It is a coming together of all strands of reform and resistance. It's an emerging culture or "counter culture" that has again taken hold. Anarchist in its foundation. Rejecting the material-baden, consumer-driven, anti-democratic multinational corporate planet fuck that permeates everything around us.*

-Lisa Fithian

Knowing that many of the community and world problems are extensive, it also essential to keep in mind that they many, if not all, are connected. For example, in our criminal injustice system, the philosophy of punishment ("justice") over rehabilitation often results in a larger prison population. Racial profiling and

skewed legislation leads to a disproportionate amount of minority inmates. The overabundance of inmates often spurs depletion in families and communities, citizenship, and depresses wages in society. How? Because of convict labor where large-scale corporations and companies employ inmates for often times less than a dollar an hour. In this example alone we have seen the functionality of racism, class, the shortcomings of capitalism and representative democracy at work--both together and apart--and this is only one example.

It would be difficult outline all of the connections between war, history, economics, race, religion, class, and the military-industrial complex. But in attempting to do so, the many movement formations at work become antiracist, antiwar, antipoverty, and nonviolent and self-defensive all at once. The convergence around one idea, around various means of action (especially those that are often thought of as being opposite rather than dynamic)--the chances for all to live a meaningful life free from the fear of war, poverty, unnecessary incarceration--should be the goal of any and every movement.

On the other hand, aspired goals should not always necessarily be to stamp out a certain, or perceived, reality. Why? An antiracist project may not be able to totally eradicate racism from each and every person in the world without the destruction of modern civilization considering much of modern civilization was built upon the foundations of race,



## Convergence:

### The Next Movement!

The next civil rights movement began as a discussion on the third facet of the Language of Homelessness. While discussing the connections of the myths that govern the American Dream (i.e. rugged individualism— notions of hard work equaling success and independence— anticlassist, upward mobility, and equal opportunity) we concluded that the battle for an amendment guaranteeing adequate food, clothes, shelter, and justice could comprise the next tour of duty for activists fighting against poverty.

Yet, with the overabundance of issues and problems that plague our communities and the accompanying resurgence and proliferation of various social movement vehicles, we at the Spirit of the Nation! thought it would be beneficial to initiate a dialogue by providing our own ruminations behind the meaning(s) of further potential movement formations and projects.

*In truth, resistance to this system of oppression and exploitation has been going on well over five hundred years. And one of the most exciting things today is the growing awareness of indigenous models of social organization and what they offer the world as an alternative.*

Lisa Fithian, taken from her foreword in Abbie Hoffman's *Steal this Book*.

One of our pressing questions to consider is what would we, as a generation, want to be known for when our children are caring for us? At the turn of the century, that generation witnessed the first world war. The "greatest generation" came of age during the Great Depression and the Second World War. The baby boomers arrived on the scene during an era of prosperity and consumerism. In mainstream thought, the Civil Rights and antiwar generations followed to pose many of the same questions regarding America's place in the world, its' history, and its' future.

So, what will be the description found on our epitaph? Would we like to be known for participating in a cycle of violence that is labeled the "War on Terror?" Would we like to be known for standing by while hundreds of thousands go homeless over the course of the year? Do we want to be remembered as the generation that consumed itself into cycles of narcissism, depression, and an unhappy life devoid of any personal and collective worth and meaning? Hopefully we will choose to be defined by an overriding sense of humanity and movement.

So how will we define the movement? As Fithian states and then asks in Abbie Hoffman's *Steal this Book* (2001 Publication), "We don't have a

## Phoenix Rising!



"What will be most exciting and growth-producing for you cannot be mass produced and sold; you must find it for yourself"

- Tim Kasser, *The High Price of Materialism*

### The mercury is rising.

There is a war going on no one was safe from. And no, I am not speaking of the "War on Terror." We are fighting for a purpose; for a place within and outside ourselves, we are fighting for the right to live with meaning. Instead of falling in line with the media constructed images of power, wealth, and worth, we are fighting to take risks. And since the powers-that-be socially police those who seek to define themselves, we risk alienation, ridicule, and ostracism. Yet, we strive to walk our own path; to form our own line.

How will we set flight? First, we must realize the cost of freedom; we must set fire to our current images of worth. The inner-visions of the "average" size woman looking into the mirror wondering whether or not she is thin enough to fit in the latest fashions, the young man who drives a dilapidated automobile down the main road for cruising surrounded by an assortment of vehicles that belong in a music video must be set aflame. It is time to burn the oppressive images of self-worth forced onto us by popular culture.

## A Movement is 2: Phoenix Rising

Check your thermometers because the mercury's rising. The *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Economist*, and many scholars have been not only reading the thermometers, but they have been waiting for it to burst. Notably, the *New York Times* dedicated a feature story, "When the Joneses Wear Jeans," to the consumerist pursuit and the redefinition of upper-class symbols. Because if we were to boil down all of the elements of our materialistic, consumerist, society, then they are reduced to a set of cheesy lifestyle clichés promised to us by advertisers. Affluence, appearance, and acceptance are all wrapped within this illusion that they sell. But we are not buying it any longer - we must wake up!

However, in the midst of our vast array of images and lifestyles that we have to choose from, many of us become willing slaves, passively chasing a perceived freedom—a false myriad of choices—of what to buy, how to look, and how to live. In fact, according to Oswald Spengler, the notion of choice and freedom are not just at the heart of Western doctrine, but of natural life itself. In *The Decline of the West*, Spengler asserts "what separates animalistic existence from the vegetative state is that the animal can choose." Moreover, servitude and freedom, according to Spengler, are "in the last and deepest analysis the differentia by which we distinguish vegetable and animal existence."

It is no surprise that whenever one lifts a clothing article from a rack, drives a new car from the lot, or even purchases a house in a certain neighborhood that these choices are often informed by the mass production of images and lifestyles to which many of us are chained. The relationship between servitude and freedom as well as the illusion of choice and consumerism has, according to scholars Tim Kasser, Bell Hooks, Richard Ryan, and Cornel West to name a few has only led to an vicious cycle that is unhealthy, unfulfilling, and plastic human existence.

In *Democracy Matters*, West states, "Neither the possession of commodities nor the fetishing of commodities satisfies young people's need for love and self confidence. Instead we witness personal depression, psychic pain, and individual loneliness fueling media-influenced modes of escapism." And in the introduction to Kasser's *The High Price of Materialism*, Ryan corroborates, "'Kasser shows how enhanced desires or 'needs' to have more or consume more deeply and dynamically connected with feelings of personal insecurity."

What is the nature of this vicious cycle? In our society full of "choices," an unhappy person sees something they think want—whether it is a certain item, person, or status—they strive to do whatever it takes to attain or achieve it.

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Rites of passage are nearly non-existent beyond college frat hazing or joining the "real-world." A meaningful experience marking a young person's transition from youth to adult simply doesn't exist in our society the way it did in the past. However, if there were a solidified rite of passage for American youth, it would probably serve to reinforce the lack of political involvement because it would excuse young people from becoming socially and politically aware until they have completed the rite—thus continuing the silence.

But the youth of this country are not forced into silence. Young people need to become aware of their size as an individual group and become aware of their potential political capital. As adolescence continues to extend, so does the size of the youth demographic. However, our numbers are meaningless as long as we remain unaware and silent.

Moreover, it is a commonly held notion that experience is necessary to make "informed" political decisions. But within our system of checks and balances, it seems that another check and balance needs to be put into its rightful place—the check and balance of the youth. This is important because it balances experience with an open-mind; it is balancing gray-haired wisdom with youthful idealism; it is balancing pragmatics with new possibilities. A young person's most valuable asset is an open mind—a rare commodity in politics. While many young people are steered by their parent's perceptions before they ever leave the home, these tend to be hand-me-down perceptions that are quickly questioned once free of the "nest."

Young citizens will only be recognized when they begin to speak out and make their voice heard. However, this need not start with organizing large protests or any other grand political movement, but can simply begin with a realization of one's unique place within our culture. Like America, this demographic appears to find itself in a state of flux. Thus, seemingly giving the youth the upper-hand in formulating a worldview that accounts for, and is conducive to, change. Yet, the older age groups will not recognize the value of the youth perception until young people themselves realize their own value and abilities, and then act upon these realizations.



## How Long Will the Youth Remain Silent?

Our country's political climate has changed very little over the years. For the most part, older rich white males are still making the rules. Granted, minority and female representation has increased, but not enough to be considered fair or balanced by any means; however, the youth still remain nearly unrecognized in mainstream politics.

Young people have experienced short glimpses of political involvement, but only where they have made a place for themselves. In the sixties the youth were known for political action ranging from youth protests for free speech and academic freedom at the University of California-Berkeley and non-violent direct action like the sit-ins facilitated by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee as well as more confrontational measures, such as the student strikes that shut down San Francisco State University. These examples are past forms of political involvement.

Currently, some of the world's youth are involved in a struggle against the perils of globalization which accompanies a social critique of our contemporary system of economics and our way of life as consumers. But this fight is relatively unknown to youth in the U.S., and there are few other causes for young people in our country to join. The youth of this country are roughly 42 million strong (18-30) and need to become aware of the affect that they could have on our state political climate.

Some argue that the current lack of involvement is tied to our country's extended adolescence. The age group comprising the "youth" is expanding past the "twenty-somethings" and into the "thirty-somethings." As people are living longer, it seems that "adult" expectations are being delayed as well—allowing the adolescent period to move past the teens and twenties, and into the early thirties.

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It's the American way, right, the pursuit of happiness? Yet, once they attain or achieve that status or whatever constitutes that level of happiness, the person experiences even more discontent because the reality of that particular level was not as personally fulfilling as they thought. Why? Because they believed that if they lost that certain amount of weight, purchased a certain vehicle, or achieved a certain lifestyle, they would find contentment; they have simply caused themselves further discontent. Money cannot buy a new personality, self-confidence, individuality, and most importantly a meaningful life. Tim Kasser probably conveyed this idea in the simplest form when he concluded that "materialism 'causes' unhappiness."

Within this materialistic market of meaning and myth making, the phoenix seems to resemble a snake struggling to eat itself. So, how do we break this destructive cycle of materialistic consumption? The initial spark must come from within; it comes from taking a realistic look in the mirror and realizing that person's socio-economic image is not who they are as a person, but a public perception. The spark also comes from being able to observe fellow human beings, and life in general, not as a commodity or status to be attained, not as a potential consumer, not in terms of a credit score or net worth, and not as entities that are so tied to a market economy in the industry of enslaving people to the most "desirable" and profitable aspects of meaning, but through the means of moving and reproducing and a lens of empathy and a more elevated sense of humanity. Meaningful lives are not massed produced by machines they are born out of human intuition, and the pursuit of something more meaningful than a commoditized life. A movement is 2.

Bill Moyers: But aren't many visionaries and even leaders and heroes close to the edge of neuroticism?

Joseph Campbell: Yes, they are.

Joseph Campbell: They've moved out of the society that would have protected them, and into the dark forest, into the world of fire, of original experience. Original experience has not been interpreted for you, and so you've got to work out your life for yourself. Either you can take it or you can't, you don't have to go far off the interpreted path to find yourself in very difficult situations. The courage to face the trials and to bring a whole new body of possibilities into the field of interpreted experience for other people to experience—that is the hero's deed.

## Vulgar Consciousness...

### A revision of our class consciousness and "The American Dream..."

The American Dream should be renamed the American Identity Problem. Think about it — nearly all Americans pursue the upper class, while most Americans consider themselves middle class, and in reality a majority of Americans are actually lower class. This identity problem exists because of an obsession with the upper class expression, through our pursuit and obsession with upper class symbols (cars, clothes, etc.), and by dubbing the attainment of upper class symbols as success. Upper class obsession is nothing new. Centuries ago, over-weight women that were never exposed to sun-light were considered attractive because it meant that they did not work — a class distinction. But now it has reversed, anorexic women who have been baked beyond recognition, with cosmetic upgrades (*up* being the key word), are now considered sexy because it means that they have leisure time to travel, and be in the sun or possibly near the ocean, and money for the *upgrades* — also a class distinction. This is a vulgar (crude, indecent) class consciousness. By obsessing over forms of upper class expression, a majority of Americans have come to identify with the upper class while simultaneously ignoring the reality of class distinction and stratification.

Our vulgar consciousness distorts how we perceive the current class stratification in the U.S., because our upper class obsession allows the lower class to be perceived negatively; just as upper class symbols are markers for success, lower class symbols have become markers for failure. According to the great American Dream the lower class has failed to make use of the supposedly vast amount of opportunity for class mobility. However, the existence of real opportunity for mobility is mostly a myth — there is simply a vast amount of credit available to purchase upper class symbols — thus further solidifying the social position of those who purchase depreciating assets that merely *represent* the upper class. Many people believe this country to be blind to social status, but that's just not the case. We have normalized our pursuit of upper class symbols to the point of identifying with only the upper-class.

Much like our American Identity Problem, the meaning of the word "vulgar" transitioned from being used to describe the common man or lower class, and has come to mean something detestable. The early use of the word referred to common people. Vulgar comes from the Latin *vulgus* which literally means ordinary, common, or shared by all. However, the word eventually changed to mean debased — considering the things of the common man or lower class as less valuable. But eventually, vulgar transitioned to mean deficient in taste, delicacy, or refinement — further stigmatizing the common man because of his delineation from the upper class. Then of course, vulgar evolved into its current use which is taken to mean crude and

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able to move with the center as long as he or she deems fit.

And yes, even in times of pervasive indifference, apathy, and cynicism—standing in the face of uncertainty, disillusion, and insecurity—the citizen must take upon the daunting task of reciting their own testament of hope. When faced against seemingly insurmountable odds and controls within the organized church, the citizen must account for this shortcoming with his/her own individualized spirituality in hopes of affecting change within that particular institution. When faced against some of the discouraging impossibilities of change within the government, the citizen must strive to account for reality in the name of public service; in the name of those who are consumed in the pursuit of justice, in the name of those who are not afforded equal opportunity or justice. Even when faced with the overwhelmingly pervasiveness of material culture, the citizen must struggle to achieve a balance between intrinsic and material aspirations. This is the role of the new American citizen: moving with the times; constantly striving to tilt the axis.

Lastly, the capacity to love remains unbridled within the citizen, and not just a "patriot's" love for one's country. Granted, love for one's country, heritage, history, etc. should not be marginal, however, it should be coupled with resounding love for all of humanity — no matter a person's race, nationality, color, creed, or religious faith. Whether it is on the societal level with fellow humans, environmental level with the practice of discretion regarding wildlife, habitat, etc., or whether it is on the personal level with one's family or one's significant other.

The citizen must love because with love comes life and without love the citizen and citizenry dies. Even the radical, Abbie Hoffman, despite all of the epithets thrown at the establishment, declared in *Steal This Book*, "Become an internationalist and learn to respect all life. Make war on Machines, and in particular the sterile machines of corporate death and the robots that guard them. The duty of a revolutionary is to make love and that means staying alive and free." It is time for a change, time for a revolution of awareness. It is time for American citizens to redefine themselves, not just as "patriots" who blindly follow the words or ideas purported by the establishment, but real patriots, progressive citizens who listen, discuss, and question the rhetoric of the prevailing establishment — no matter where one stands politically. This is the duty of a citizen — to move, reproduce, collaborate, and love. A Movement is 21

Every era of resistance has come out of new freedoms for peoples. The coming resistance will be greater than any in human history, for this time all the peoples of the earth will share in it.

- Pearl Buck, Writer



## The Redefining Citizen...

For many, to be a good citizen requires one to be an informed voter. I beg to differ. The overall purpose of the citizen in the context of these dynamic moments is to move and reproduce; not to remain comfortable with the present state but to move with the times. Sure, the citizen recognizes the importance of not necessarily capturing the moment, despite his or her compelling nature to capture, or pursue, the nature of a particular moment through either action or language, but he or she is preoccupied with moving and adapting to the vitality of the subsequent moments while simultaneously admiring the satisfaction of the past. Furthermore, the citizen is not just unique, but dynamic, striving to live in a state of change that represents the relatively unpredictable condition of nature, albeit not contrived, because for one to strive for this state would be futile.

Therefore, the citizen works to construct organizations in the real sense of the word: to create an entity which adequately captures the condition of being of the participants. This "organizer," as termed by Saul Alinsky in *Rules for Radicals* is "loose, resilient, fluid, and on the move in a society which is itself in a state of constant change," and an organization should reflect this. Hence, this condition will always be considered and reconsidered as with our physical lives.

So, if this condition exists in a state to accommodate change, then a citizen must not be afraid to disrupt the existence of certain entities. The aspect of disruption is not destruction, although, disruption through creative social activism, moving and reproducing could lead to a particular entity's deconstruction. And yes, even the citizen respects certain entities, yet s/he may loathe hierarchy. Thus the goal of a revolution of awareness is not necessarily an effort of overturning the government because the citizen does not seek to replace one hierarchy with another. The goal is movement, collaboration, and reproduction of those efforts in other individuals. Thus, the citizen must be willing and able to work with, through, and, simultaneously, against certain systems of control. As a result, the citizen will come to disregard social, political, economic, and cultural labels in efforts to accommodate for the ever-changing reality and allow the waves of collaboration to commence.

Additionally, the citizen must be apt to identify particular points of contention and points of tranquility, which are triangulated around an ever-moving center that encapsulates the desired change(s). These points of tranquility should be of inherent value akin to Tim Kasser's intrinsic values: "self acceptance and personal growth, relatedness and intimacy; and community feeling and helpfulness" (Kasser, *The High Price of Materialism*) while in negotiation with material aims. Thus, the citizen must be

indecent.

Why do we perceive the lower class as failed (crude, indecent) and the upper class as successful (refined, stylish)? Well, it is not because we look at the situation in clearly economic terms, but more because of our orthodox American trend of pursuing upper class symbols and forms of expression -- this is how we evaluate people within our cultura. This perception, this consciousness, that perceives upper class symbols as intrinsically valuable should be considered vulgar (crude, indecent), not the objects and ideas associated with the lower class. But, many people would argue that this type of society would be equally meaningless because it would lead to a mechanical or purely practical society -- a society that exists merely to survive would be just as meaningless as a society that pursues only upper class symbols.

However, I am not arguing for a strictly pragmatic society; one in which cars are purchased only for transportation; where a house is only large enough for the family it contains; a place where people only purchase the minimum amount of food necessary to sustain a healthy (not over-weight) existence; etc. While a growing practical awareness in our society would definitely serve to balance our own-it-all consumerism, a society based purely on pragmatics would lack style - expression - and I am not arguing against expression. But, there is a stark difference between considering something stylish because it is expressive and considering something stylish because it represents some

connection to the upper class. There is a word for upper class stylistic perception -- it is called elitism.

While pure pragmatics is just as meaningless as the mindless pursuit of upper class symbols; if pragmatics could be balanced with a self-consciousness expression then we might have not only a more accurate perception of our current class delineations, but also an effective means of communicating the problems. Instead, we allow our vulgar consciousness to stigmatize the lower class while simultaneously stratifying and ever widening our class delineations.

When we focus only on upper-class symbols as meaningful in our society then we begin to identify only with those problems affecting the upper class, rather than focusing on how to affect change within the middle and lower classes. Our vulgar consciousness allows politicians to continue to pass legislation that benefits the rich while continuing to ignore the 30 million working poor and the 3 million homeless, not to mention the ever-growing lower class.

A more appropriate sense of style should embrace a realistic perception of one's class rather than ignoring one's social status in pursuit of meaningless upper class symbols. This awareness will lead to action. This is where the pragmatic mind set becomes necessary. A practical approach is necessary to alleviate the problems affecting the lower and middle classes, but this is only enabled by self-consciousness expression. We must see the reality of

## A Movement is 2: Vulgar Consciousness

our class environment so that we can think of solutions that will effectively change society. This message of pragmatics moves beyond a purely mechanical and practical existence when we value an expression that is self-conscious rather than upper class obsessive.

An oscillation between pragmatics and style, between reality and expression, between self-consciousness and change; this will effectively begin to move society towards a place where we are able to account for necessary changes while still having something meaningful to pursue. We need to shed the vulgar consciousness that is constantly telling us to pursue and identify with the upper class, because this pursuit simultaneously blinds us to the reality of our own situation as well as the state of those who are less fortunate than ourselves. We need a practical mind set coupled with a self-conscious sense of expression -- a movement is 2.

What is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, anthropomorphisms, in short, a sum of human relations which were poetically long use seem solid, canonical, and binding to a nation. Truths are illusions about it has been forgotten that they are illusions, worn-out metaphors without sensory impact, coins which have lost their image and now can be used only as metal, and no longer as coins.

Friedrich Nietzsche, *On Truth and Lying in an Extra-Moral Sense* (1873).



## SPN! A Call To Action!

### Who Are You Calling Unpatriotic?

Thomas Paine is rolling in his grave. Our current use of the word patriot would have caused Paine to put pen to paper and write yet another pamphlet. Were he to be revived from his current state and complete another work of dissent, it would be patriotic in a sense that is currently lost from our contemporary use of the word "patriot."

It seems that in the wake of the current Middle East military action, in our post-9-11 world, the common use of "patriot" is rather confusing. If it is thought of it in regards to the men who originally fought for our freedom and independence from Great Britain. The use of patriotism at that time was not to create a hyper-nationalism, as it is used now, but was used to rally support for the fight for freedom and independence.

While the President's use of the word "patriot" is bad enough (using it to title the Patriot Act), it is the daily common use that is most disturbing. Patriot is currently used to refer to those who support the war effort or support some sort of national agenda. Many who have come out to protest the war or question the President's current foreign policy have been described as being unpatriotic, but is it their patriotism that is being questioned? No, what is being questioned is the essential element of a democracy—a citizen's right to speak out against the government.

As of late, many citizens are taking our right to question and speak out for granted. Larry Schweikart and Michael Allen wrote a response to Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States* which is titled *A Patriot's History of the United States*. In the intro to their response, they accuse Zinn of having Marxist biases because his book is titled a "Peoples" history. However, Schweikart and Allen show their ignorance to what democracy means in their critique of Zinn. They not only overlook the fact that "demos" the root of the word of democracy means the people, but they also seem to forget the first three words of our constitution: "We the people." Would they argue that the writers of the constitution had Marxist biases as well?

The word meanings change with time, but the word patriot has nearly come to mean the opposite of what it meant early in our country's history. In the past, it meant working against the British government and the people who were attempting to maintain control. But now it seems that the word means supporting our government representatives without question.

However, real patriots are not people who blindly support Presidential policies and national agendas, but they are the people who are willing to risk going against the grain—people who understand that questioning the status quo may not always be popular, but it is definitely necessary.



shows these negative perceptions (concerning the homeless) to be false a majority of the time. Even the homeless person who just wants his next meal buys into this narrative—we see them quite often at intersections holding signs that simply read—"Will work for food." This is probably more telling than any other problem connected to the narrative—someone who is hungry cannot simply ask for help in our society, but has to offer a service in return.

We live in a country where we are free to pursue life, liberty and happiness, but those freedoms do not guarantee us food, clothes and shelter. The John Doe laws are quickly turning those who are having trouble attaining

The use of the narrative in this negative sense is nothing new. Ronald Reagan used the narrative to critique welfare—talking of welfare queens with far too many kids and a Cadillac around the corner. Welfare benefits were later reduced thanks to President Clinton—who used the narrative as support for his reduction. Moreover, the current tide in politics continues to move in the conservative direction—which definitely favors the idea of the American Dream—especially meritocracy. The issue of homelessness is one which is blind to political ideology, or *maybe* current political ideologies are blind to it as something that should become a key issue.

All over the country cities are passing what we are calling the John Doe laws (if this sounds similar to Jim Crow it is for a reason)—which are essentially criminalizing homelessness. The only support for these laws is the American Dream narrative. This narrative causes people within middle and upper classes to wonder why the homeless aren't taking hold of their equal opportunities. Moreover, the narrative also causes people to stigmatize the homeless as deviant, lazy or mentally ill because there must be some reason why they aren't working their way up the social ladder. However, nearly all research

## The Language of Homelessness

America: The Land of Opportunity or the Home of the Privileged?

The American Dream is revealed as dealing with homelessness inadequately at two key points. First, is the idea of "equal opportunity." This phrase is nearly synonymous with the American Dream—a common nickname for America "the land of opportunity." The second point is the idea of the United States as a meritocracy. A meritocracy is a system where the rewards are essentially based on one's merits. Meritocracy is directly linked to equal opportunity because there cannot be a meritocracy without everyone having an equal opportunity to be prove worthy of earned rewards.

As far as homelessness and many of the current inequalities which exist in our society, Americans, it seems, are fine with inequality as long as there is equal opportunity. An excerpt from a recent Wall Street Journal article summarizes this attitude well:

Many Americans believe their country remains a land of opportunity. That perception explains why Americans, much more than Europeans, have tolerated the widening inequality in recent years. It is OK to have ever-greater differences between rich and poor, they seem to believe, as long as their children have a good chance of grasping the brass ring. (The Wall Street Journal - "As Rich-Poor Gap Widens in the U.S., Class Mobility Stalls")

However, this belief in equal opportunity for all is not supported by quantitative analysis. Since 1968 the University of Michigan has been conducting the longest running study regarding the economic state of over 8000 households in the U.S. This study has not only been following the original parents from 1968, but also the children of those families and their incomes as well. What follows is an overview of the study:

30.7 percent of white males with 12 or more years of education will experience poverty between the ages of 25 and 75, [while] 98.3 percent of black females with less than 12 years of education will experience poverty. Each of these three characteristics [race, gender, and education] exert an independent influence upon increasing or decreasing the odds of poverty. This is particularly true of race and education, as is indicated by the fact that in each of the 11 separate logit models, race and education were significant at the .001 level.

If affluence and poverty are this closely tied to race and education then how can we claim to have a meritocracy? We do not earn our race, and likewise, we surely do not

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earn the social status that we are born into. Yet, we seem to think that the rewards merited within our system are based on hard work and equal opportunity, not race and class.

However, putting race aside, just for a moment, consider the educational system. Many have called our system of education the great equalizer—positing our system as a means through which those born into the lower ranks of our country are able to “pull themselves up by their bootstraps.” However, the educational system is far from opening the door of equal opportunity to the children in this country. Steven J. McNamee and Robert K. Miller, authors of *The Meritocracy Myth*, summarizes this problem well:

“Working-class children get working class educations, middle-class children get middle-class educations, and upper-class children get upper-class educations. In each case, children from these different backgrounds are groomed for different roles that they will likely fill as adults. In this way, education largely reproduces existing inequalities across generations. [...] The public schools attended by children from higher-income families are better because a significant portion of school funding comes from local property taxes (U.S. Department of Education 2000, Table 160 and Figure 11), which produce more revenue in privileged residential areas.

But this is only part of the story. Schools in these areas are “better”

for reasons other than amount of economic resources spent on students. High-income families, living in high-income residential areas, not only provide a strong tax base that can be tapped to fund quality schools; such families also have the political clout needed to more effectively demand quality education for their children.”

While this is statistically evident, consider for a moment the few who have “pulled themselves up by their bootstraps,” and made it to college. While many are easily caught up in this little American Dream narrative as it connects to education; quickly the other side of the coin is forgotten—that being the commodification of labor—supply and demand. Labor functions under the same demands as the rest of the market and as such, an increase in college degrees means that the overall value of those degrees is lessened. McNamee and Miller discuss this problem as well:

Educational achievement has been accompanied by the development of an elaborately differentiated structure of tiers and quality levels. [...] For example, when working-class children became better represented in high school, college became the key to higher social status. When working- and lower-middle-class children began to enter college in larger numbers, the system shifted again to a higher point, and graduate or professional school has become the key to higher social status. Thus, increases in educational attainment are completely

compatible with stable levels of social inequality and class reproduction.

This problem is evident on any college campus. Most students who desire a higher wage level, which is generally thought to be merited to those who earn a college degree, are now forced to go onto graduate school in order to be eligible for the higher paying entry level jobs. The horror stories of people with bachelor's degrees who end up waiting tables, rather than working in their field, are common to most college students. While many consider this to be mostly rumor, the sad truth is that this is more real than we want to believe.

While I site only a few key sources for the sake of time (and I encourage you to investigate the sheer amount of data on this subject)—quantitative analysis clearly shows equal opportunity and meritocracy to be myths as supports for the American Dream. Thus, our question: if the myth of equal opportunity and meritocracy are so evident that even popular publications are beginning to realize the problems, and if quantitative analysis prove them false, then why is the belief in the American Dream and equal opportunity still so wide spread?

*Well, the answer is narrative.* The first article in the series released by The Wall Street Journal reveals this dilemma. While it was the point of their article to discuss the current social stratification which exists in our country, they made an attempt to balance their critique by supporting the American Dream with narrative. They told stories of Benjamin Franklin and Andrew Carnegie, and other similar success narratives. However, they did not cite a single statistic regarding the positive side of the American Dream. In fact, there is no such uncontrived statistic or set of statistics that show this to be the land of opportunity—the only support for the American Dream is story telling.

Granted, there is nothing wrong with story telling—there is nothing wrong with narrative. However, the narrative becomes dangerous when it begins to allow the pendulum to swing the other direction. When the narrative begins to explain *why* those at the bottom of our system haven't succeeded; when the narrative begins to become a *force* of oppression and ignorance to those at the bottom of the system; when the narrative begins to *allow* lawmakers and generally rational citizens to stigmatize those on the lower end—this is when we must begin to rethink the use of narrative as the only support for a myth.

How long will we continue to tell stories while in reality 3 million people remain homeless? How long will we continue to tell stories while 30 million remain in poverty? How long will we continue to tell stories while 30% of America is working poor?